

**EMBARGOED TO: 00.01 hours Wednesday 27 January 2010**

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**'FREE CARE' REQUIRES RADICAL REFORM AND PROPER FUNDING**

The Bill introducing free personal care at home for older people with critical needs must be the start of radical reform of the care system, backed up by proper funding, Counsel and Care's annual conference will hear today (Wednesday 27 January 2010). The growing number of older people left to struggle on their own or with family carers should prompt all politicians to commit to long-term solutions for better care.

Stephen Burke, Chief Executive of Counsel and Care, will tell the charity's annual conference, 'Delivery quality care: fair to everyone, affordable to all':

"Older people and their carers live in what could be described as 'good, bad and uncertain times'. The good times stem from the transformation of care across the country, giving people more choice and control over the support they need, and helping older people to stay in their own home longer. The bad are the budget cuts which are already tightening eligibility criteria further and increasing charges for care; but worse is to come and older people seem to be in the firing line. The uncertainty comes from the Personal Care at Home Bill, the forthcoming White Paper and the general election, leaving many unclear about the future for care.

"There are worries that an ambitious agenda for reforming care could be replaced by a financial imperative to keep older people out of hospital and residential care at all costs.

"Clearly better care at home is what most older people want and if it's 'free', then even better. But we need to ensure that proper support is available in local communities so that staying at home doesn't mean loneliness, isolation and neglect. It has to mean more than four 15 minute visits a day, rushing older people in and out of bed with no support to eat proper meals, chat and enjoy life. And it must recognise that a care home will still be the option of choice for many older people and their families.

"Free care' would be a popular pledge at the election. People want to know what care they will get and how much they will be asked to pay. And it needs to be set in the much wider context of family policy with an ambitious vision for a reformed care and support system that is fairly funded.

"A new care system must reflect the reality of older people's and carers' lives. They don't just depend on social care but also on better housing, transport, safety and community facilities as well as adequate income. That can only be achieved by housing and health and other partners working closely together with local government.

"So when the forthcoming care White Paper maps out plans for a national care service, it must be based on some fundamental principles:

- Universality – creating a system that everyone uses and providing support such as information, advice and advocacy to all
- Portability – a national assessment process which is consistent wherever you live and which doesn't change if you move
- Personalisation – giving older people and their carers real choice and control, a real voice and a chance to contribute themselves
- Quality and equality – better care for all wherever they live, delivered by a better paid and trained workforce
- Prevention – investing in home adaptations, telecare and other early interventions that are increasingly recognised as paying dividends
- Support for family carers and other social networks in local communities

- Integration – shared local priorities reflected in pooled budgets and joint commissioning, building on the Total Place pilots
- Value for money – getting care and support at the right time and in the right place.

"Underpinning a national care service must be a transparent funding system. 'Free care' could be paid for by introducing a care duty on estates, generating the extra funding needed. This would be seen as fair and simple, much fairer than losing your home to pay for residential care.

"The potential rewards are huge. The economic and social benefits would far outweigh the costs. And despite looming cuts in public spending, with older people and their carers making up the majority of voters at the election, no party can afford to be less than ambitious in its manifesto."

-ENDS-

## NOTES TO EDITORS

- Counsel and Care's Annual Conference: '**Delivering quality care: fair to everyone, affordable to all**' takes place on Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> January 2010 at the Inmarsat Conference Centre, London, EC1. For more information see: <http://www.neilstewartassociates.com/sh267/> or [www.counselandcare.org.uk/influence/events](http://www.counselandcare.org.uk/influence/events)
- The media are invited to attend the conference on 27 January 2010. Please contact Suzannah Povey from Neil Stewart Associates on 020 7324 4361 or email [suzannah.povey@neilstewartassociates.co.uk](mailto:suzannah.povey@neilstewartassociates.co.uk)
- Copies of the *Care Concerns 2009* report can be downloaded from our website: [www.counselandcare.org.uk/influence/publications](http://www.counselandcare.org.uk/influence/publications)

- Counsel and Care is a national charity working with older people, their families and carers to get the best care and support. Advice on issues affecting older people and carers can be obtained by calling 0845 300 7585 or emailing [advice@counselandcare.org.uk](mailto:advice@counselandcare.org.uk)
- Counsel and Care's Advice Service opening hours are 10am-4pm Monday-Friday except Wednesday afternoons.
- More information about Counsel and Care can be obtained from [www.counselandcare.org.uk](http://www.counselandcare.org.uk)